

The TABLE

By HORACE HAZELTINE

LORCHA

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SYNOPSIS.

Robert Cameron, capitalist, consults Philip Clyde, newspaper publisher, regarding anonymous threatening letters he has received. The first promises a sample of the writer's power on a certain day. On that day the head is mysteriously cut from a portrait of Cameron while the latter is in the room. Clyde has a theory that the portrait was mutilated while the room was unoccupied and the head later removed by means of a string, unnoticed by Cameron. Evelyn Grayson, Cameron's niece, with whom Clyde is in love, finds the head of Cameron's portrait nailed to a tree, where it was had been used as a target. Clyde pledges Evelyn to secrecy. Clyde learns that a Chinese boy employed by Philip Murphy, an artist, had been nearby, had borrowed a rifle from Cameron's housekeeper, Clyde makes an excuse to call on Murphy and is repulsed. He pretends to be investigating alleged infractions of the game laws and speaks of finding the head of an opium pipe under the tree. Clyde's theory is confirmed. The Chinese boy is found dead next morning. While visiting Cameron in his dressing room a Self-Defense mirror in his dressing room is shattered. Cameron becomes nervous as a result of the shock. The third letter appears mysteriously on Cameron's desk. It is a veiled threat against the life of Cameron. Clyde tells Cameron the envelope was empty. He tells Evelyn everything and plans to take Cameron on a yacht trip. The yacht picks up a fisherman found drifting helplessly in a boat. He gives the name of Johnson. Cameron then, from a secret, while Clyde's back is turned, a fruitless search is made for a motor boat seen by the captain just before Cameron disappeared. Johnson is allowed to go after being closely questioned. Evelyn takes the letters to an expert in Chinese literature, who pronounces them of Chinese origin.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

Very briefly she explained that she had seen the professor that morning, and had laid before him the original letter and my copies of the others, and that he had kindly promised to make a careful study of them and acquaint her with the result later in the day. She thought it better, however, that I should call upon him for his conclusions, she said, as they would probably be verbal, and she doubted her own ability to convey them to me with entire accuracy. Of course she had told him nothing as to the circumstances surrounding the letters. As they bore no date, and were undressed, she had him to infer that they were autographic curiosities belonging to her uncle, in which we were all three interested.

I had met Professor Griffin on several occasions. Once or twice he had contributed articles to The Week, and while we were scarcely intimate, we were on terms of friendly acquaintance. He was an oldish, white-haired gentleman, at rather the delicate type, with long, somewhat peaked nose, and light, watery blue eyes, which seemed to bulge behind the strong lenses of his gold-rimmed spectacles.

He received me in his study, a spacious, book-lined room on the second floor of his old Colonial stone house. "I have been deeply interested, Mr. Clyde," he began, "in the autographs and copies which Miss Grayson brought to me. They are unique specimens of English composition, in that the Oriental influence is so clearly demonstrated throughout. Do you, by any chance, know where Mr. Cameron obtained them?"

I was hardly prepared for this question, but I answered as promptly as possible that they had recently come into my friend's possession, I believed, but from just what source I had not learned.

The three sheets lay before him on the writing-table of his old-fashioned mahogany secretary; and now he took up one of the copies, holding it at some distance from his eyes, as though his glasses, thick as they were, were not as powerful as his sight required.

"The three writings," he went on, in the tone of a class-room lecturer, "evidently form a series, of which, I take it, this is the first."

"The one which says, 'Take warning of what shall happen on the seventh day,'" I queried.

"Yes, that is the first. The other of the copies, in which occurs the phrase 'once more,' is, of course, the second. And the original autograph is the last."

"Exactly," I agreed. It seemed to me that all this was very obvious, but in courtesy I could not say so.

"All three," he continued sagely, "begin, as you must have observed, with the same sentence, 'That which you have wrought shall in turn be wrought upon you.' That is a quotation."

"A quotation?" I exclaimed, in surprise.

"A quotation from Mencius, the great expositor of Confucius, who lived B. C. 372 to 299. In the original, a word meaning 'Beware' precedes the warning, and a more literal translation of the passage would be: 'Beware! What proceeds from you will return to you again.'"

It seemed to me this was taking a great deal for granted. I feared that the professor, like many savants who specialize, was straining the fact to fit his theory, but he very promptly disabused me.

"The supposition that the words are a paraphrase of Mencius," he explained, "would not be tenable, perhaps—the idea is not anomalous—were it not that we find running

through the series, other quotations that are unquestionably of Chinese origin. The first letter, for example, concludes with: 'The ways of our God are many. On the righteous he shows blessings; on the evil he pours forth misery.' This is from the Book of History, or 'Shu King,' in which are the documents edited by Confucius himself. It usually has been rendered in this way: 'The ways of God are not in vain.' On the good door he sends down all blessings, and on the evil door he sends down all miseries.' That is the more exact rendering. And again, in the second letter, he paused a moment, taking up the second sheet, and focusing his dim eyes upon the lines. "We find," he went on, "fine words and a smiling countenance make no virtues," which is from the Lunhu, or Analects, of Confucius, in which the words and maxims of the sage are recalled by his disciples. 'Stalling countenance' is hardly the best translation. 'Insinuating appearance' is more nearly the English equivalent, and I should prefer 'are rarely concealed, or associated, with virtue' to 'make no virtue.'"

"Those, of course, are unmistakably translations," I agreed.

"And so are the concluding sentences of the third, the autograph, letter," he assured me. "Say not Heaven, is high above! Heaven ascends and descends about our deeds, daily inspecting us, where ever we are." I find it in one of the sacrificial edicts of Kau, and it is the best rendered of all the excerpts."

"So your conclusion as to the authorship is—?" I queried.

"Chinese, undoubtedly," he answered. "These were written, I should say, by a Chinaman, educated, probably, in this country. His English is the English of the educated Oriental, but the quotations from Confucius and his commentators are characteristic."

With the average Chinaman, to know Confucius is to know all; what he said is sufficient; what he did not say is not worth saying. Another identifying feature is the effort to make afraid. Their religion is fear."

Having concluded his exposition, Professor Griffin was disposed to enter upon a more or less lengthy discourse on Chinese character and literature in general. However, illuminative this might have been under ordinary conditions, I was assuredly in no mood to listen to it at this time. The information he had given me, while it merely verified suspicions which I had held from the first, set me to speculating on the individual source of the letters; and with so modern an instance at hand I was naturally disinclined to consider the authorship of writings dating back often a thousand years and more beyond the Christian era.

With what grace I could, therefore, I discouraged a continuance of the theme, and having thanked him most heartily, pocketed the notes with which he was good enough to furnish me, and prepared to depart. But as I stood at his study door, his lean, scholarly hand resting in mine, he detained me for a final word.

"The symbol!" he exclaimed, his pale eyes lighting at the recollection. "We forget the symbol!"

"Oh, yes," I returned, my interest revived, "that silhouette at the bottom."

"It is unmistakably Chinese," he said. "I am not very familiar with the symbolism of the East, not as familiar as I should be, possibly; but Chinese writing, you know, in its origin, is picture writing with the addition of a limited number of symbolical and conventional designs. This figure, I should say, represents a lorcha, or small Chinese coasting junk, and you can rest assured that the threats contained in the letters were with a view to reparation for some crime or injury connected in some way with such a vessel. That is as near as I can interpret it. But if you would like to know more—if you would like to get something more nearly definite—I can refer you to one who can, I think, give you the information."

"By all means," I implored, "I shall appreciate it greatly."

"An authority on this subject is living not very far from here. He spent many years in China, is something of an artist himself, and made, I understand, a study of Oriental symbolism. He lives at Cos Cob, and his name is—"

"Murphy!" I interrupted, as a flood of illumination swept over me.

"Philip Murphy. Yes. Do you know him?"

"I have met him," I returned shortly.

And thanking the professor once more, I hurried away, with a course of action already shaping in my mind.

CHAPTER XI.

The Chinese Merchant.

It was while Professor Griffin was talking of Chinese characteristics that the thought of Little Mow Chee first occurred to me. The professor said

something about the average Chinaman's disinclination to speak of death, directly, and how he invariably employed some euphemism. The phrase "pass from sight of men into torment" the professor pointed out as an illustration. And then I remembered Little Mow Chee, who was in my class at Yale, and how, once, in speaking of the demise of a fellow classman, he had used the odd expression, "he has slotted old age," which I afterwards learned was quite a common form in China.

It was now a year or more since I had seen Mow Chee, but I recalled that at our last meeting I had made a note of his address; and so on reaching my desk the next morning I looked it up. Curiously enough a private detective agency which I had arranged to consult chanced to have its office in the same building on lower Broadway as the Pacific Transport company, by which Mow Chee was employed; and thus the plan which had been shaping mentally the previous afternoon, as I hurried away from Professor Griffin's, was readily set in motion before noon of the day following.

In the evening I had discussed it with Evelyn; and though the detective feature did not at first meet with her approval, she eventually conceded that it was a necessary part of the project. It was agreed, however, that the real purpose for which that aid was invoked should not be divulged. Philip Murphy was to be shadowed and daily reports were to be made to me. That he had been under suspicion of brutally murdering his Chinese servant was sufficient reason for the proceeding, and to the detective agency I gave no hint of any further consideration.

As for my Celestial classmate, I was not by any means sure that I should find him at the Pacific Transport office. I knew that for some time China had been calling upon her sons of western education to return to their mother country for service, and I feared that Little Mow Chee might already be customs tacked of Shanghai, or some other imperial province. But my misgivings were very promptly allayed; for no sooner had I stepped within the outer office than he came, and came hastily forward, with a smile of greeting on his square, flattened, yellow face.

His desk was just back of the door counter which ran the length of the room, and a glance at his piled contents showed me that he was very busy. Moreover, there was no opportunity here for the privacy which I desired; so after an exchange of greetings, and a few conventional inquiries, I invited Mow to lunch with me at the Savarin, at whatever hour would best suit his convenience.

Somewhat to my dismay, he fixed upon one o'clock. As it still wanted ten minutes of noon I now had over an hour of leisure, which, as may be imagined, promised to hang rather heavily, the more so, as I was impatient to make some real progress in my quest.

Well street being at hand, I concluded to call on a friend there who usually handles my investments, and make a convenience of his office. On the way, I bought an afternoon paper, and as my broker happened to be at the Stock Exchange, I had ample opportunity to read it from first column to last. It proved about as thrillingly interesting as the early afternoon reprints of what one has already read at breakfast usually are, and I was about to drop it to the floor, when my eye caught a group of headlines on the last page, which, up to that moment, had escaped me, but which now suddenly riveted my attention.

CELESTIAL CLAIMS MYSTERIOUS BOX ON FALL RIVER PIER

Anything concerning Celestials, I suppose, would have attracted me, just then, but the burden of this was so peculiarly pertinent, that it seemed as if it must have intimate connection with the tangle I had undertaken to unravel.

With the paper gripped tightly in both hands, and my head bent intently forward, I raced through the frivolously-written article which followed; and from a superabundance of cheap wit and East side slang managed to extract the somewhat meager facts. A truck, driven by a Chinaman, it seemed, had that morning taken from the pier of the Fall River Line a square box, measuring about five feet each way, and perforated with a number of auger holes. The brilliant space-writer had given his imagination free rein as to the contents, speculating as to the possibilities, from edible Chinese dogs to smuggled opium, but he had omitted to furnish the name and address of either the consignor or consignee. "The truck, drawn by the slant-eyed white horse, and driven by the phlegmatic Chin, clattered away in the direction of Mott street," the account concluded.

After all, it was a very commonplace, everyday occurrence. Probably the auger holes were only knot holes, transformed by the reporter's imagination.

Nevertheless, I thrust the paper into my pocket. Mow Chee might throw some light on the matter. He would know, in all likelihood, what sort of goods were shipped by way of the Fall River Line to his countrymen in New York.

We secured a corner table in the inner room at the Savarin. It was not so crowded there and it was less bustling and noisy. My companion attracted some little attention, of course, but not sufficient to prove annoying. New York, as a rule, pays small heed simply to the unusual, and Chinamen are common enough not to be absolute curiosities even in the big downtown restaurants.

A very dapper little fellow was Mr. Mow; neatly and inconspicuously clad, and well brushed and combed. He was for recalling old college days, when he was coxswain of the class crew and I pulled the stroke oar, but my time was too precious for such reminiscence, and as speedily as possible I broached the subject I had at heart.

"Now," I began, perhaps less delicately than I should, "there's a saying, you know, that the only good Indian is a dead Indian. That wouldn't apply to the Chinese, would it? And yet, while there are some very excellent Chinamen, there are some pretty bad ones, aren't there?"

He grinned, exposing his fine teeth. "Oh, yes," he answered, "there are good and bad, but the percentage of bad is less in my country than in some others." I caught the significance of his remark, and realized that I deserved the rebuke.

"And amongst the educated Chinese, here in New York?" I went on, without stopping for comment. "There are a few bad?"

He was still smiling. "Bad?" he queried. "What do you mean by bad? There are some who have vices, yes. Some gamble, some smoke opium; some get the best of a bargain."

"Are there some who would kill?" I asked, bluntly.

"Oh, no, no!" he protested, without raising his voice. "I certainly should hope there are none such among the educated."

And then I told him about the three letters, and what had happened, omitting only Cameron's name and place of residence. Imperturbable little chap that he was, he listened without emotion. When I concluded he said: "You are sure they were Chinamen who did this?"

"Would men of any other nationality quote Confucius and Mencius?" I asked.

"No, I think not," was his reply, "and yet it might be done by crafty persons to mislead."

But I could not agree with him.

"We are not revengeful as a nation," he said, "we are rather long-suffering. If Chinamen did what you tell me, it was in return for some very great injury; some crime, I should say, against their parents or near kinsmen."

"But my friend was never in China," I declared. "And he was the last man in the world to harm anyone."

For a little while Mow Chee ate in thoughtful silence. Presently he looked up.

"Clyde, my friend, I know so little of my own people here in New York. But one man I know, a merchant, who is very prominent and very upright. He is a big man in the Six Companies. I will give you a card to him; you can speak to him in confidence, and if he can help you, he will, not only because I sent you, but because he stands for all that is best, and desires that my countrymen in the United States shall have the respect they deserve from your citizens. I would send you to the Chinese Consul, but my friend, Mr. Yup Sing, is better."

My hand was on the newspaper in my pocket, but I did not show it to Mow Chee. I would reserve it for the encyclopaedic Yup Sing, whose address, as written on the card which my classmate furnished me, was on Mott street, a few doors from Pell.

New York's Chinatown is a much more familiar locality to the transient visitor than to the average citizen. In all the years of my residence in the metropolis, of which I am a native, I had never before had either the occasion or the desire to dip into this most foreign of all the city's foreign sections. To me, Chinatown was as a far country. Vaguely I had an idea of its location. I lay, I knew, east of Broadway and west of the Bowery; but its latitude was not clearly defined.

My impulse was to hail a cab, give the driver the number of the Mott street establishment, and so, without further individual effort, be whirled away to my destination. But there are no cab stands on lower Broadway; and to walk to Broad street, where the cabman lies all day in wait for the prosperous stock broker and his affluent customer, required more time than in my impatience I was willing

to grant. Therefore I boarded a Broadway car and was drawn haltingly northward, until, on reaching Canal street, I alighted in sheer desperation and turned eastward.

Here a letter carrier, of whom I inquired, sped me straight to my goal—a couple of blocks as I was going, a turn to the right, a few blocks more, and the bulk windows of the Yup Sing Company would come into view.

I found the establishment easily enough. But had it not been for the name printed in big Roman lettering, I should never have imagined it a Chinese business house. There was no display of goods in the big windows, which were screened half way up by light blue shades, giving the front an appearance similar to that of the average American wholesale house.

Having passed inside, however, there was no such illusion. All about me were the characteristic products of the Orient, from brilliant silken embroideries, and exquisite gold and silver and bronze work, to cheap cotton and linen fabrics, lacquer furniture, and straw slippers. And the atmosphere was further enhanced by the half-dozen or more Chinamen who were lounging in the middle and far distance, each with shaven crown and coiled queue and each in the more or less brilliantly colored native dress.

One of these, a comparatively darkly-tinted young man with full, round visage, came forward as I entered.

"Is Mr. Yeh in?" I asked.

He was inclined, I saw, to hesitation and so I produced Mow's card.

"Oh, yes," he said, after studying it for a moment. "Oh, yes, Mista Yeh! He in." With which he left me, and taking the card with him disappeared behind some draperies at the back of the big crowded store.

Between the others, who regarded me for a moment only with idle interest, there was, while I stood there, a rapid exchange of observations in their native tongue, mingled with a sort of high-glitched cackling which I assumed to be laughter.

I had turned my back towards them, but presently a shuffling of feet along the floor informed me of the approach of what I imagined was my returning emissary. On whirling about, however, it was to face an elderly man in purple silk garments and a black skull cap—a man of thin, almost cadaverous yellow visage, whose upper lip and chin were adorned with a sparse growth of silky blue-black hair, and upon the bridge of whose nose rested a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles.

"You would see me, sir?" he asked, and I noted that there was scarcely the slightest indication of the foreigner in either pronunciation or accent.

"If you are Mr. Yeh," I smiled, "you can, I fancy, from what Mr. Mow tells me, give me the information I am in search of."

He did not smile in return, but his thin face assumed an expression of benignity that was as much of an invitation to lay my problem before him as were his words.

"Anyway I can serve a friend of Mr. Mow," he said, "will be a pleasure."

But, as he spoke, the benign expression passed. Once again that thin, sallow-faced face, with its hollow cheeks, and small, deep-set eyes, had become unapproachable.

At least two of his partners or salesmen were within ear-shot, and I turned a significant glance towards them, as I said:

"The subject is a confidential one, Mr. Yeh. If I could speak to you—"

"In private?" he finished. "Certainly, sir. Will you kindly step this way?"

He led me to the rear of his store, holding aside a curtain of heavy embroidery, through which I passed into a smaller room, furnished with carved teak wood and ornamented with magnificent specimens of Chinese porcelain and pottery. A little Chinese girl, not over eight years old, and wearing a blouse and wide breeches of a pale cerulean silk, stood beside a table. Before her were several small sheets of rice paper on which she was making designs in water colors.

Ignoring the child, he indicated a chair near the only window, screened, like the windows in front, with a blue shade. And when I had sat down, he drew up a chair for himself opposite me.

His manner, in spite of the benignity of a moment before, was not encouraging, and for a little I was embarrassed as to just where to begin. At length, however, I said:

"I fear, Mr. Yeh, that some of our countrymen have recently made a terrible mistake."

"A mistake?" he echoed, gravely. "A mistake that I trust it is not too late to repair. Briefly, they have kidnapped a gentleman of fortune and influence, one of my dearest friends, in a manner most mysterious, after first subjecting him to the annoyance of a series of anonymous letters and a succession of singular, nerve-torturing acts of trespass."

Mr. Yeh glanced at Mow Chee's card, which he still held.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Couldn't Miss Them. A black broadcloth suit marked "Rush order" lay on the tailor's table ready for cleaning and pressing.

"About the only kind of dirt I can see on that suit is chalk," a man remarked. "Looks as if it had been dragged through a chalk pit." "The woman put it there purposefully," said the tailor. "Each chalk mark is in the form of a ring that encircles a grease spot. She hunted out each spot in the sunlight and marked it. I couldn't possibly miss any. Fine idea, that. Maybe I shouldn't have found them all back here in the dark."

His Consolation. "So you've lost your nice pussy-cat since I was here last?" sympathized grandma. "Too bad! Of course you miss him dreadfully, don't you?" "Well, yes," six-year-old John assumed a look of chastened sorrow; "but then, grandma, since I've heard so much about this germ business, I try to think it's just as well!"

Its Weight. "Cholly complained of having something on his mind." "I know what it is. I saw him strike his head against a lot of cobwebs in the corner."

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